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Foe of Sandinistas a Mystery to U.S.

One of the early heroes of the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua was a colorful and enigmatic leader who was best known as "Commander Zero." His real name is Eden Pastora, and he is now fighting against the Sandinistas he once served.

The profile we've pieced together, from interviews with past and present associates and from the CIA's secret files, leaves the mystery of Pastora unsolved. Is he a democrat, a Marxist or merely an adventurer?

Eden Pastora Gomez was born about 48 years ago, the son of a Costa Rican mother and a Nicaraguan father who was killed by an officer in Anastasio Somoza's National Guard when the boy was 7.

He was studying medicine at the University of Guadalajara in 1959 when word of a student massacre led him to join the underground Sandinista movement. He was one of several student revolutionaries who were sent "to the exterior," meaning Cuba or the Soviet Union, to win support for the cause, while the older men fought as guerrillas in the mountains.

In 1963, a curious incident occurred. The young rebel and a companion, Alejandro Martinez, were sent by Cuban President Fidel Castro to Mexico to pick up \$80,000 at the Soviet Embassy. The money was to be delivered to Castro, who would then disburse it to the Sandinistas.

But Castro never got the \$80,000. Pastora refused to let Martinez accompany him to the embassy, and returned five hours later. Less than a month after that, Martinez was arrested in Havana,

accused of being a CIA agent and of having stolen the Soviet money. He spent several years in prison before he finally won an interview with Castro and told him that Pastora had taken the \$80,000. Castro was evidently convinced, because Martinez was released forthwith.

In the summer of 1978, the rebel leader became famous when he and a small force of Sandinistas seized the National Palace in the heart of Managua and liberated 59 rebel prisoners.

During the months of civil war that followed, Pastora commanded the Sandinistas' southern front with mixed success. When Somoza fled and the Sandinistas entered Managua in triumph in 1979, Pastora was still pinned down by the National Guard in the south. His late arrival in the capital may have cost him a top spot in the ruling junta.

As it was, he served in a couple of second-echelon jobs and finally resigned in July 1981. He traveled to Cuba, Libya and Costa Rica, where he publicly denounced his former comrades-in-arms in April 1982, and formed his own anti-Sandinista force. In the years since, Pastora has excelled at raising money and recruiting soldiers, but has had little success in the field.

A quixotic blend of showman, soldier, patriot and womanizer, Pastora is a genuine "caudillo," or leader of men. He has more lives than a cat, and President Reagan is known to be more than a little concerned that some unforeseen twist of fate could put Pastora in the presidential palace in Managua. No one can be sure which way Pastora would lead his country.